

Together with Tenants – revised plan and next steps

July 2019

1. Background

We published our draft Together with Tenants draft plan and charter in February 2019, which set out four proposed actions intended to strengthen the relationship between tenants, residents and housing associations.

The plan and charter were then subject to a two-month open consultation between February and April. We received over 2,500 consultation responses from tenants, residents, housing associations and other stakeholders. In June 2019, we published the [consultation findings](#) and explained how we [intended to respond](#) to those findings.

This document confirms how we are taking the plan forward, including changes to the Together with Tenants Charter, and more detail on how the plan will be tested and strengthened by our group of early adopters.

This plan is only the first step towards building a stronger relationship between tenants, residents and housing associations. From the conversations we've had over the last two years and the responses to the consultation, we know there is an appetite for making further changes over the medium to long-term to create a genuine and lasting partnership between tenants, residents and housing associations.

We will work with our Tenant Advisory Panel, Member Steering Group, our members, tenants and tenant and resident groups to find the best way of opening up this conversation.

2. The plan

As we stated in our response to the consultation findings, there was broad support for the four proposed actions set out in the draft plan. We think these actions, taken together, will help address many of the questions facing housing associations about how to build a stronger relationship with tenants and residents, whether housing associations genuinely listen to tenants and residents, and whether they are as transparent, accountable and open to scrutiny as they could and should be.

Based on feedback from the consultation, we have made some changes to the language describing the actions. You can find the updated descriptions below.

For the plan to be as effective as possible, it is important these four actions are taken together. We have also tried to describe the impact each action is intended to have and the difference we think they will make to tenants and residents.

2.1 A new requirement in the National Housing Federation Code of Governance for boards to be accountable to their tenants and residents

- Introducing a new commitment at board level will help ensure all organisations value the voice and experience of tenants and residents, and use this insight to inform decision-making and moreover that this becomes an important conversation for boards where this isn't already the case.
- The governance standards set out by the regulator specify that 'registered providers shall adopt and comply with an appropriate code of governance' and 'areas of non-compliance with their chosen code of governance should be explained'. By including this new commitment in the Federation's Code of Governance, organisations will be assessed by the regulator on to their compliance with this commitment, and there will be consequences where standards are not met.

2.2 A new Together with Tenants Charter

- The charter will ensure all tenants and residents know what they can expect from their housing association landlord, regardless of where they live, what type of home they live in or who their landlord is.
- The charter is intended to ensure a more consistent experience for tenants and residents, while leaving room for tenants, residents and housing associations to agree more specific standards and targets on the issues that are important to them.

2.3 Tenant and resident oversight and reporting of progress against the Charter

- Introducing tenant and resident oversight and public reporting against the commitments set out in the charter will give tenants and residents a stronger role in holding their landlord to account. Boards will be expected to respond and take action where required.
- Tenants and residents that want to be involved in this oversight will receive support from their housing association to agree what will be measured, and how performance will be reported. This will include using a wide range of data and information to ensure that the charter doesn't become a tick-box exercise and a range of views are sought.

2.4 Giving tenants and residents a stronger collective voice with the regulator

- Tenant and resident oversight and reporting against the charter may uncover issues of interest to the regulator, including potential non-compliance with the consumer standards.
- Linking the Together with Tenants approach to regulation in this way will ensure the plan has teeth and action is taken where necessary to protect the rights and interests of tenants and residents.

3. Taking the plan forward

3.1 Changes to the Code of Governance

The consultation responses indicated widespread support for a change to the Federation's Code of Governance, to include a clear requirement for boards to be accountable to tenants and residents. There is some work to do in this area in terms of defining what we mean by accountable and considering how boards can demonstrate this in practice.

As we stated in the draft plan, one way boards could demonstrate their accountability would be to sign up to and implement the Together with Tenants Charter and implement the proposals for tenant and

resident oversight and reporting, as set out in this plan. This will help ensure that, while sign-up to the charter will be voluntary, there is a real impetus for it to be adopted across the sector.

We will be consulting widely on changes to the Code of Governance in the coming months and will work with our early adopter organisations, Tenant Advisory Panel, Member Steering Group, our members, tenants and tenant and resident groups to define and test how this requirement should work in principle and in practice, and how it should link to the rest of the Together with Tenants plan.

3.2 The revised Together with Tenants Charter

While the consultation responses indicated broad support for the concept of a charter, they revealed that we needed to think carefully about the coverage and language.

It was also clear from the responses that we need to ensure the charter is meaningful and leads to real positive change for all tenants and residents.

Following the responses to the consultation and input from our Tenant Advisory Panel and Member Steering Group, we have simplified and streamlined the charter commitments and have tried to make the language as straightforward as possible.

We want to ensure that the commitments are easily understood, and that each housing association, working in partnership with tenants and residents, can implement them in a way that works for them.

The commitments

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships – housing associations will treat all tenants and residents with respect in all of their interactions. Relationships between tenants, residents and housing associations will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication – tenants and residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information from their housing association on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice and influence – views from tenants and residents will be sought and valued and this information will be used to inform decisions. Every individual tenant and resident will feel listened to by their housing association on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability – collectively, tenants and residents will work in partnership with their housing association to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect their homes and services and the quality of the homes and services they provide.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality – tenants and residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When things go wrong – tenants and residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Tenants and residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

Testing and implementing the commitments

The purpose of the charter is to ensure tenants and residents know what they can expect from their housing association and have a more consistent experience regardless of who their landlord is.

We have heard that the issues covered by these commitments are those that are important to tenants and residents, but we know we need to define what these commitments mean in practice and what they would look like in practice.

Working with our early adopter organisations, Tenant Advisory Panel, Member Steering Group, our members and tenant and resident groups, we will begin to define what good and excellent looks like from the perspective of tenants, residents and housing associations against each of these commitments.

We do not intend for housing associations to be formally assessed against each of these commitments. Instead, the purpose is to set an expectation to help housing associations where they need it and help tenants and residents in their role in overseeing and reporting progress against the charter.

We want to encourage all housing associations to work towards being excellent on all of these commitments.

We will explore with the early adopters what support and guidance will help organisations that are striving to reach good and excellent but aren't quite there yet. We also want to share examples of good practice, to inspire others and give them ideas of how they could drive change in their own housing associations.

However, as we've said before and in the following section, where tenant and resident oversight of the charter identifies potential non-compliance with the consumer standards or significant issues affecting the lives of tenants and residents, we think this should be an issue for the regulator.

In the draft plan, we included a table with ideas of how housing associations could demonstrate they had met the commitments in the charter. While many people we spoke to through the consultation said they found this helpful, we think it is important to first define what good and excellent look like against each of these commitments. It is also important to remember that tenants and residents, in their oversight role, will ultimately decide and report the progress housing associations are making against these commitments.

Local variations to the charter

It is important that the charter leads to a consistent experience for all tenants and residents, so we want housing associations to adopt the commitments. The commitments are deliberately simple and not prescriptive, and we understand that housing associations may want to introduce local variations which includes specific targets or different language, that have been developed and agreed with their tenants and residents.

Where a local charter demonstrably and visibly addresses the same commitments as the Together with Tenants Charter and has been developed with clear support from tenants and residents, then we think this is satisfactory. We will explore how this could work in practice with the early adopters.

3.3 Oversight and a stronger collective voice for tenants and residents with the regulator

The consultation responses indicated strong support for tenants and residents having a role in overseeing and reporting progress against the commitments in the charter and for this being linked to regulation.

Genuine tenant and resident oversight and reporting of the charter is an important action in the Together with Tenants plan. Not only will it ensure that the charter doesn't become a tick-box exercise, it is also an important step in housing associations opening themselves up to better scrutiny.

We are keen to see innovation in this area which sees tenants and residents supported to carry out independent scrutiny and oversight, which is evidence-based and draws on insight from different sources.

Many tenants and residents expressed concerns about what would happen if the oversight and reporting of the charter only happened at a very superficial level. This could undermine the principles and effectiveness of the Together with Tenants plan in driving change.

These are important issues that we need to explore further with our early adopter organisations and the Tenant Advisory Panel and Member Steering Group. We will consider how organisations can be supported and challenged to develop effective oversight arrangements in partnership with their tenants and residents. As far as possible, we will also link this to the changes to the Code of Governance, so having effective and genuine oversight arrangements becomes an established characteristic of a well governed organisation.

We will also continue to talk to the regulator and the Government about how tenant and resident oversight of the charter can play a formal role in regulation and how tenants and residents can have a voice in any approach to consumer regulation, linked to the Together with Tenants plan. This could work alongside the proposed role for key performance indicators set out in the Social Housing Green Paper. We will also explore this further with the early adopters.

4. Next steps

We will work with early adopters to test this plan in action from the summer 2019 through to spring 2020.

We will look at how the revised charter set out here works in practice, what effective oversight looks like in different scenarios, and whether the plan has the potential to drive culture change across the sector and improve the experience of tenants and residents.

The Federation will support the testing of the plan and charter during the early adopter process, where we will capture and share emerging innovation and good practice.

We will share some early lessons from the early adopters at the National Housing Summit in September 2019.

The Tenant Advisory Panel and Member Steering Group will continue to guide, challenge and support this work throughout the early adopters' process.

By spring 2020 we are aiming to have concluded the early adopter process.



By spring 2020 we are also aiming to have made any final changes to the plan based on what we've learned from the early adopters, produce any guidance to support housing associations implement the plan and charter, and begin the process of a national roll-out of the plan.